

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first, I wish to thank the Senator from Illinois for his leadership on this issue, as well as my friend from Rhode Island who has been such a staunch fighter, and other colleagues on the floor.

I can't help but think: Here they go again. One more time we are in a situation where we need to extend unemployment benefits for people who are out of work, through no fault of their own—breadwinners not bringing home the bread, through no fault of their own—and we are right back where we were before with the Senator from Kentucky, who held up the ability for us to move forward to help families, to help people who have lost their jobs or are out of work and looking for work, who are caught up in an economic tsunami, an economic disaster, through no fault of their own. Here we are again.

We just left a debate where we went most of last night with the same kind of effort to block, to stall, to say no, and to try to stop us from moving ahead and doing something very important for families, small businesses, tackling the national debt in this country, and with health insurance reform. We just went through hours and hours and hours with our colleagues on the other side becoming just a party of no and playing games, holding up things politically, finding tricks to make people vote on things they support, knowing if they do, that will stop us from moving forward on health insurance reform.

We finished that. We made it through. We cast the votes and achieved the goal for the American people of saving money for middle-class families, saving money for small businesses, saving money for seniors on their medicines, and putting in place something that will make a difference in bringing down cost and making sure every family can finally have a family doctor. The same day we finally get through all that, here we are again.

I come from the State with the highest unemployment in this country, and it is not because people in Michigan don't want to work. People in Michigan know how to work. They work very hard. They are out looking for work. People are trying to hold it together, some with part-time jobs right now, trying to just get through until they can get back a job that is going to allow them to be able to take care of their families and have some sense of security; to stop holding their breath while they are waiting for things to turn around. But we are in a situation right now where we have six people looking for every job. Six people are vying for every job.

People are caught in an economic disaster that they didn't create, and our job has been to help them get through that so they can keep a roof over their head, food on the table, take care of their kids as we work to create an economic situation, partnering with

business, to turn this around. Things are beginning to turn around but not fast enough for any of us. We are working very hard to turn that around, but the reality is we still have more than 700,000 people in Michigan who have lost a job and who want to work. They are out of work, through no fault of their own, and find themselves in a situation where they are looking to their government to understand the situation for their family and place some value on that.

We seem to be able to pay for things when people think it is important. I have been here long enough to live through a situation where tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans somehow were passed even though they weren't paid for—and more than once. My guess is there will be proposals to do it again. But when you are talking about somebody who has worked all their lives and finds themselves in a situation where they do not have a job because of what is happening in the economy, then we say, but for you—for you—we are going to have a different set of rules. We are going to have a different set of rules. We are not going to treat this as a disaster—an economic disaster—as we have at every other time in our country where we move forward with emergency spending. For you, because you are not as important as those folks on Wall Street or the folks who got the big tax cuts, we are going to have a different set of rules.

Well, that is why we are here, because we don't think that is fair. We don't think that is right. It is not right.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used 5 minutes.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, as I yield the floor, I wish to say we are going to be here, and we are going to keep fighting over and over again, as things move forward this year and beyond, on behalf of the people who want a job and who don't have one today, who are counting on us to help them make it through this and do what they need to do to care for their families.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Michigan, and I yield the remaining time of the 15 minutes to the Senator from Oregon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon is recognized.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I join my colleagues in talking about the challenge that is faced by America's working families. Back home in Oregon, our economy has been hit pretty hard. We have a timber industry, and when you aren't building houses across the country, then you can't sell lumber. So we have mills going out of business across the State of Oregon and a lot of people unemployed—a lot of unemployed people who would be working in the woods cutting down the trees as well as working in the mills. Then we have the challenge of our manufacturing industry that has been hit pret-

ty hard too. We build a lot of RVs and light planes, and those products aren't selling too well in this recession. We have a fruit industry and we have a Christmas tree industry. We ship a lot of that overseas, but the foreign demand is down, and domestic demand is down as well. We have those Mexican tariffs that have been applied to Christmas trees and fruit as well, which has had a pretty strong impact.

You pile up all of this on a State that is on the Pacific Rim and add to that the fact that the entire Pacific Rim economy is depressed, and you have a State that not so long ago was second in the Nation only to Michigan in terms of unemployment.

Well, things have improved a little in Oregon. We are no longer second worst, partly because many other States have continued to get worse. We are at about 11 percent. That is just about twice the unemployment we had not so long ago. That is a lot of struggling families. Unemployment is a program that helps keep the economy in gear during a difficult recession. It helps break the headlong rush into a depression. It helps families stabilize while they are looking for a job.

Unemployment compensation is not a sweet deal. You don't get paid a great deal with unemployment but maybe just enough to get by so your house isn't one more foreclosed property; so you are not one more family on the street, wondering where you are going to live; so there isn't one more set of children whose schooling has been disrupted and their path in life has been disrupted and as a parent you wonder how it will impact them down the road. This is about us watching out for each other here in America.

I can tell you it has been very frustrating to me to watch Members of this body during the last two administrations decide to do things in which they said: You know what, we are going to give away the Treasury to the wealthiest Americans, and we are not going to have any way of paying for it because we just to want give away money to the wealthy. So the wealthy are doing very well in America. But what about the workers in our Nation? The average compensation for a working family plateaued the year I graduated from high school—1974. During the 36 years since, working families have been earning the same amount. Yet the productivity of our Nation has gone up enormously. Where did all that wealth go? All that wealth went to the wealthiest Americans. Then my colleagues across the aisle are going to stand up tonight and self-righteously proclaim we should not do this without paying.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time of the majority has expired.

Mr. MERKLEY. We need to extend this unemployment for working families, not kick them when they are down.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. COBURN. I think we had an agreement with the majority whip that